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ABSTRACT

This report describes the methodology and initial results of an evaluation of the universal (school-wide) Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) initiative in Illinois, including (1) strategies for establishing research-based practices and data-based evaluation systems in implementation schools; (2) methodology and initial findings of the effect of school-wide systems in 14 individual schools; and (3) implications for enhancing systems of care approaches around students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and their families. A sample of 14 schools completed school profiles from a group of 30 schools selected by regional coordinators as schools representing a cross-section of PBIS schools in their region. Data indicate schools were successful in utilizing program data to guide interventions that improved student behavior. Results include reduced numbers of in-office discipline referrals, in-school suspensions, and out of school suspensions. Results also suggest that a focus on improving behavior at the universal level can lead school teams to begin establishing systems for effective interventions for students with more intensive and chronic problems. For example, schools reported that when they experience overall reductions in total discipline incidents (i.e., detentions, office discipline referrals, suspensions), teachers and administrators are more capable to explore individual interventions for a lesser number of students. (CR)

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School-Wide Positive Behavior Systems: Improving School Environments for all Students Including Those with EBD

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Introduction and Overview

Schools continue to be challenged to effectively meet the needs of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD). However, strength-based school interventions for students with EBD can be difficult to implement if teachers and school staff are frustrated by a high incidence of antisocial behaviors across the student body as a whole. Overall school safety represents yet another challenge that school staff must address. Together these factors contribute to a heightened awareness of the need for schools to use more effective behavioral and disciplinary approaches around all students. More positive and effective school environments can serve to prevent the development of severe behavioral problems, as well contribute to the success of interventions for those students with the most comprehensive needs.

This summary describes the methodology and initial results of an evaluation of the universal (school-wide) Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) initiative in Illinois, including: (a) strategies for establishing research-based practices and data-based evaluation systems in implementation schools; (b) methodology and initial findings of the effect of school-wide systems in 14 individual schools; (c) implications for enhancing system of care approaches around students with EBD and their families. Strategies for measuring implementation progress to effect consistent and effective behavioral practices among school staff are described. Implications for improving school environments to enhance positive approaches for students with intensive emotional/behavioral challenges will be discussed.

What is Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS)?

PBIS is a process designed to create safer and more effective schools. This systems approach is focused on building the capacity of schools to teach and support positive behavior in all students by developing research-based school-wide and classroom-specific discipline systems. PBIS is not a prescribed program but, rather, provides systems for schools to design, implement, and evaluate effective school-wide, classroom, and student specific discipline plans. PBIS includes school-wide procedures and processes intended for: (a) all students, staff, and school settings; (b) non-classroom settings within the school environment; (c) individual classrooms and teachers; and (d) individual support for the students who present the most challenging behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 1999; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, Walker, 2000).

Illinois' PBIS Initiative. Illinois is a demonstration site for the PBIS Center of the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The Illinois' PBIS Initiative builds upon a history of successful implementation of system of care and wraparound approaches (Eber, Rolf, & Schreiber, 1996). Illinois' EBD Network, which provides leadership and support for wraparound services through schools, has partnered with safe school initiatives in Illinois to implement positive school-wide discipline systems. Nearly 200 schools have received training in, and are implementing, the PBIS system. In addition, 30 site-based coaches have been identified and trained by OSEP's National Center staff; these coaches support implementation and evaluation of PBIS in Illinois schools. The PBIS focus is intended to complement and support the existing interagency and school-based wraparound efforts by creating more effective host environments for implementing strength-based interventions around students with or at-risk of EBD, while also preventing behavior problems from occurring in the general student body (Eber, Sugai, Smith & Scott, in review).

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Methodology

A total of 185 schools participated in the larger project. Fourteen schools voluntarily completed school profiles from a group of 30 schools selected by regional coordinators as schools representing a cross-section of PBIS schools in their region. The profiles provided demographic and student behavior data including office discipline referrals (ODR), in-school suspensions (ISS), and out of school suspensions (OSS) for the 1999-2000 school year. Data on numbers and types of interventions implemented school-wide, estimated level of staff participation and estimated level of impact were also provided. The 14 schools included 9 elementary, 4 middle, and one high school. Seven schools were urban, 2 were suburban and 4 schools were rural. Almost half (48.4%) of the schools' students received free and reduced lunches, and about half (49.2%) of the schools' students were of minority status. All geographic regions of the state of Illinois were represented in the sample.

Evaluation Strategies

Evaluation strategies are a critical component of training and implementation for Illinois PBIS schools. School teams are asked (by the ISBE EBD/PBIS Network statewide project) to complete implementation checklists (quarterly) to monitor and guide each school's progress with PBIS. Site-based coaches complete checklists on schools as well, and assist their schools in reviewing and analyzing existing school-based data systems including ODR, ISS, OSS, and attendance. Leadership teams at each school site are instructed in how to use these data to guide decision-making for the design and evaluation of research-based behavior strategies to reduce rates of undesirable behaviors indicated in their data. Teams are taught to guide the school staff in implementing instructional strategies around replacement behaviors, high levels of reinforcement for competing behaviors, and clear, consistent adult responses to incidents of misbehavior. Checklist and profile data is analyzed as a joint effort between the statewide project team and the National PBIS Center at the University of Oregon.

Results

Teams were asked to report the number and type of interventions implemented along the continuum of support. Forty-nine interventions were reported (and described) across the 14 schools as follows:

- 33 universal strategies (80-90% of students)
- 11 targeted group strategies (5-15% of students)
- 5 targeted individual strategies (1-5% of students)

Teams were asked to estimate the level of school staff participation for each intervention. Participation ratings are expressed as the percentage of a school's staff members who were involved in implementing an intervention. Ratings follow for 46 of the 49 interventions reported by the fourteen schools:

- 27 interventions: staff participation was reported as 90-100%
- 10 interventions: 80-90%
- 5 interventions: 70-80%
- 1 intervention: 60-70%
- 3 interventions: <50%

Finally, teams were asked to estimate the level of impact the interventions achieved. Fifty percent (n = 24) of the interventions were rated as either "Very High" or "High" on a six-point Likert-type scale. Level of impact was rated at:

- 14 Very High
- 20 High
- 11 medium
- 2 Low
- 0 Very Low
- 1 None

This data on numbers and types of interventions and staff participation is preliminary in nature. The focus in the next school year is to increase the quality of the data (greater representation of schools) and examine the correspondence between these data sets. This will provide a better understanding of how staff participation corresponds to impact across all three levels.

The rates of office discipline referrals (ODR), in-school suspension (ISS), and out-of-school suspension (OSS) also were reported by the schools. The following is a summary of information reported that is reflective of change in student behavior. Results are represented as rate per day per 100 students so that it is possible to compare and combine information from schools with different enrollments.

ODR data indicates a decrease of .16 per day/per 100 students

- Pre-PBIS average rate was .84 per day/per 100 students
- Post-PBIS average rate was .68 per day/per 100 students

ISS data indicates a decrease of .14 per day/per 100 students

- Pre-PBIS average was .42 per day/per 100 students
- Post-PBIS average rate was .28 per day/per 100 students

OSS data indicates a decrease of .08 per day/per 100 students

- Post-PBIS average rate was .26 per day/per 100 students
- Post-PBIS average rate was .18 per day/per 100 students

Although this rate of change in this preliminary data was not examined for statistical significance, the direction of change was viewed as positive feedback on the effectiveness of interventions for these schools. More consistent data management systems are being put in place for schools for the next school year to allow for increased quality and quantity of this data which will allow for more in-depth analysis.

School-specific strategies. Data from individual schools were summarized into one-page profiles which described the interventions designed and evaluated by each school. School-specific summaries included the unique strategies adopted by each school, and illustrated how schools were using data to guide decision-making about changing student and staff behavior. The information reported by school PBIS teams suggests that these schools also were using these data to improve interventions and to design proactive interventions for students with EBD who require more targeted and intensive interventions. Excerpts from two school-specific summaries follow.

- A Middle school reports a 71% reduction in the number of students receiving 5 or more, and 10 or more in-school suspensions (ISS). A 33% reduction in the total number of students receiving OSS from the previous year was also documented, dropping from 57 to 38 out-of-school suspensions. This school's PBIS team worked directly with individual teachers to develop Positive

Behavior Contracts for students who continued to have behavior problems. The team and teachers involved rated the impact of these interventions with targeted students as "Very High."

- An urban elementary school reported a 47% reduction in OSS from the previous year, dropping from 117 to 62 out-of-school suspensions. Fighting, physical assault, and vandalism were the most common reasons for suspension found in this data set. Second graders experienced an 80% reduction in out-of-school suspensions, dropping from 46 to 9 OSS. This elementary school established a Teacher Assistance Team to work with teachers on targeted interventions and further data collection. The team learned that cafeteria, playground, and exiting from the bus are the settings where most office referrals (ODR) are made. Staff perceived that the majority of students' problem behaviors were motivated by gaining attention from peers, followed by avoiding work, and expressing anger.

Individual profiles are available for review in the PBIS section of the Illinois website at www.ebdnetwork-il.org

Discussion

While the results of this study are encouraging, it should be noted that behavior change data were only available from 14 of the 185 participating schools and may not represent a change across all participating schools. However, the data do suggest that these schools were successful in utilizing program data to guide interventions that improved student behavior. Results include reduced numbers of in-office discipline referrals, in-school suspensions, and out of school suspensions. Results also suggest that a focus on improving behavior at the universal level can lead school teams to begin establishing systems for effective interventions for students with more intensive and chronic problems. For example, schools have reported that when they experience overall reductions in total discipline incidents (i.e. detentions, ODRs, suspensions), teachers and administrators are more capable (i.e. have the time and motivation) to explore individual interventions for the lesser number of students experiencing behavior difficulties. These school teams are currently being trained in implementation of wraparound processes for these students with more chronic problems. School staff are learning how to engage families, community agencies, and natural support persons to create teams that can design effective behavior change strategies for students. These child/family teams are being guided to use data (e.g., functional assessments, information gained from conversations with families) to design individualized, strength-based interventions across home, school, and community. Data collection around these students and their families will need to be collected and analyzed to determine the effects that school-wide PBIS approaches can have on students with EBD and their families over time.

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